

Barbara Strozzi - Virtuosissima Compositrice (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1. Claudio Monteverdi - *Hor che 'l ciel e la terra* 8:25 2. Barbara Strozzi - *Lagrime mie* 8:57
3. Barbara Strozzi - *Priego ad amore* 3:41 4. Sigismondo D'India - *Dispietata pietate* 2:37 5.
Barbara Strozzi - *Che si può fare* 12:10 6. Barbara Strozzi - *Silenzio nocivo* 4:51 7. Barbara
Strozzi - *Vecchio amante* 5:26 8. Barbara Strozzi - *L'usignuolo* 4:23 9. Claudio Monteverdi - *Si
ch'io vorrei morire* 2:59 10. Barbara Strozzi - *L'amante modesto* 6:29 Céline Scheen,
Mariana Florès - soprano Fabian Schofrin - countertenor Jaime Caicompai - tenor Matteo
Bellotto - bass Cappella Mediterranea Leonardo Garcia Alarcón - conductor

The virtuoso Venetian diva of the 17th century, Barbara Strozzi, Monteverdi's heiress, journeys the passions of the soul through a daring mosaic of styles and rhythms. Leonardo Garcia Alarcon, who is one of the rising generation of baroque conductors, is leading a major research project on the specific parameters which make up musical performance, paying particular attention to improvisation techniques and the relationship between text and music. His work at the Ambronay Festival has focused on the performance of 17th-century Italian music including rich and little-known repertoire of motets and madrigals by Barbara Strozzi, Isabella Leonarda and Antonia Bembo. ---Editorial Reviews, cdandlp.com

This is a fascinating, colourful, and in places controversial anthology of the music of an extraordinary woman. Barbara Strozzi, admirer of Monteverdi and pupil of Cavalli, was already showing prodigious talent as a singer at the age of 17, being referred to in the phrase "virtuosissima cantatrice" which provides the cue for the title of the present disc. Renowned also for her intellect and her beauty, by the time she was 25 she had already published her first book of madrigals (1644), some of which are included here. Taking a leaf from Monteverdi's book, and in particular from his 8th book of madrigals, but very much with her own individual style,

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Strozzi's music is eloquent, dramatic, emotional and profound.

All these qualities are vividly demonstrated in these beautiful, carefully considered performances by Leonardo García Alarcón and his group Cappella Mediterranea. The programme is designed to offer a sampling of Strozzi's musical development, from polyphonic madrigals to accompanied monody and beyond; a couple of items by Monteverdi, and one by Sigismondo d'India, are added to the mixture in order to suggest, as Alarcón explains in his booklet notes, a Venetian musical evening. His players and singers all perform superbly, the star in my view being the soprano Mariana Flores for her stunning rendition of the monumental lament over an ostinato bass, "Che si può fare" from Strozzi's "Arie a voce sola" of 1664 - a spellbinding performance that combines deep feeling with infinite delicacy. The instrumental accompaniments are beautifully arranged and played, with lovely improvised ornamentation from the cornett among others, although I for one could have done without the percussion intrusions in Monteverdi's madrigal "Hor che 'l ciel e la terra" - the great master's music already expresses vividly the poet's inner turmoil and fury at the words "Guerra è il mio stato", and there is no need for anyone to bang on a drum to prove the point. In fact percussion is used again later on, in Strozzi's "Vecchio amante", but here it works much better, especially since trumpets and drums are actually mentioned in the text.

The disc is well documented and attractively presented; the booklet includes all the Italian texts with translations into English and French, a short but fascinating biography of this extraordinary composer, as well as enlightening comments by the conductor and some atmospheric photos of the musicians and recording sessions.

There are a number of recordings of Barbara Strozzi's music available, but this one from Alarcón and Cappella Mediterranea is surely among the very best. In particular, unlike some of the other discs which concentrate on a single genre or opus number, it presents music from different stages of her life - and, what is more, in the context of works by some of her contemporaries. The performances from this very fine early music group are brilliant, thoughtful and deeply committed, very much in the way the music deserves. Existing Strozzi fans need not hesitate, while baroque enthusiasts who are not yet familiar with her music will find this CD a fascinating, indeed mesmerising, introduction to the work of a bold and original genius.

---Stephen Midgley, amazon.com

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